

Story 2001 (1969 Tape 14)

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Location: Tokat, capital of Tokat Province; but tale was recorded in Erzurum by Dr. Saim Sakaoğlu.

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The Youngest Daughter of the Bezirci¹ and the Son of the Bey²

One day Beyoğlu was sitting by the gate of his mansion as a bezirci was walking past his property. Beyoğlu saw this merchant and called to him, “Come here, bezirci!” When the merchant came before him, Beyoğlu said to him, “Bezirci, what is being referred to by this expression: ‘Golden heads, silver heads, and copper heads’?”

¹A bezirci is a seller of linseed oil. Since the heroine of this tale is given no name, she is known throughout as “the youngest daughter of the seller of linseed oil.” This becomes cumbersome and wordy after awhile in the English translation, and so we have retained the Turkish term bezirci for the merchant.

²In Republican Turkey there are no beys. The term refers to a Turkish aristocrat of Ottoman, Seljuk, and pre-Seljuk times, and goes back to the 8th or 9th century—and perhaps earlier. The bey was a landed nobleman, sometimes wealthy and often politically powerful. In the 10th-century Book of Dede Korkut he was a tribal chief or one of his close associates. The Turkish bey was roughly equivalent to a British lord or baron. The Turkish expression for son of the bey is beyoğlu. When capitalized it is used almost as if it were a name. The Turkish here is much less awkward than the English translation, and so we have throughout the tale called the male lead Beyoğlu.

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The bezirci replied, “Master, I do not have any answer to that question.”

Beyoğlu then said, “You must return here with an answer to my question within forty days. If you do not do so, I shall have you executed.”

The bezirci left Beyoğlu’s mansion in fear and returned at once to his own home. His oldest daughter noticed that there was something wrong with him, and so she asked, “Father, why are you looking so pale?”

The bezirci told her about the question that Beyoğlu had asked him to answer. “I do not know the answer to that question. He wants to know the meaning of the expression ‘Golden heads, silver heads, and copper heads.’ If I cannot answer that question within forty days, he will have me killed.” His oldest daughter did not know the answer to that question.

The next day the bezirci went out and walked and walked, asking everyone he met for an answer to Beyoğlu’s question. At the end of the day he returned home, where his middle daughter asked him, “Father, why do you look so pale?”

“Beyoğlu asked me the meaning of the expression ‘Golden heads, silver heads, copper heads.’ If I cannot answer his question

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within forty days, he will have me killed. Do you know the answer?"

But she did not know the answer either.

On the third day the bezirci again spent several hours walking about and asking people for help, but none could give him the information he needed. That evening his youngest daughter asked him, "Father, are you ill? You look very pale."

The bezirci told her what had happened and the question he was supposed to answer for Beyoğlu. "I have been asking people on the streets that question for two days, but none of them has known the answer. I asked your two older sisters, and they did not know it either. I shall be executed in forty days unless I can explain the meaning of the expression 'Golden heads, silver heads, copper heads'."

The youngest daughter said, "Father, stop worrying! Here is the answer. The golden heads are the rulers and pashas.³ The silver heads are good Muslims, and the copper heads are infidels. Go and tell Beyoğlu that this is the answer to his question."

The bezirci was greatly relieved that his youngest daughter had saved his life. After thanking her for this, he went to the mansion and said to Beyoğlu, "I have an answer to the question that you asked me.

³The word pasha today means general. In pre-Republican Turkey, however, it often referred to the military governor of a province or other section of the empire.

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The golden heads are the rulers and pashas. The silver heads are the good Muslims, and the copper heads are the infidels.”

Beyoğlu answered, “This is a very intelligent response to my question. How did you arrive at this answer?”

“My youngest daughter was the one who provided me with that answer.”

Beyoğlu admired the cleverness of the girl and decided that he would like to marry her. He said, “Bezirci, may I have the hand of your youngest daughter in marriage?”

The bezirci answered, “I must first ask my daughter whether or not she is willing to marry you. If she accepts your proposal, I shall not object.”

Back home the father reported to his youngest daughter that the son of the bey wished to marry her. After thinking about this for a few minutes, the girl said, “If Beyoğlu will take me under his arm⁴ to the public bath and carry my bohça⁵ for me as we go, I shall accept his proposal.”

⁴This is not meant literally, of course. To be under someone’s arm is to be under his or her guidance and protection.

⁵A square piece of fabric (cotton, satin, or silk) in which a female wraps her clean clothes plus bathing equipment for a trip to a public bath. With bathing facilities now in most homes, fewer Turks patronize the hamam (public bath), and so the bohça is seen less

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When this condition for marriage was reported by the bezirci to Beyoğlu, the young man was offended. He said, “No! I should never accompany any girl to a bathhouse and carry her bohça for her!” The youngest daughter therefore refused to marry him.

After some time had passed, Beyoğlu repeated his proposal of marriage, but again the girl rejected his request. Shortly after that, the country became involved in a war with some people living in China. During the time that Beyoğlu was preparing to lead a unit of troops in that war, he sent a message to the bezirci’s daughter: “I must now go to the battlefield. Won’t you marry me before I leave?”

She responded, “Beyoğlu, I shall not marry you, but may you go happily and return safely.” She observed the preparation of Beyoğlu’s troops and saw that Beyoğlu and his aides all wore white uniforms, rode white horses, and took along a white tent in which to sleep. The youngest daughter bought white uniforms, white horses, and white tents for herself and several attendants. Then after disguising herself as a man, she and her attendants mingled with the troops as they departed.

When the army reached the Chinese border, it set up its camp. After Beyoğlu’s white tent had been erected by his aides, the bezirci’s daughter had her attendants set up her white tent facing his. Beyoğlu

frequently, except in some rural areas. When a bohça was embroidered or otherwise decorated, it became a kind of status symbol.

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said to one of his men, "Look at those troops across from us. They have exactly the same kind of white uniforms, exactly the same kind of white horses, and exactly the same kind of white tent that we have. Go to the master of that tent and invite him over here to meet us."

After she had received this invitation, the bezirci's daughter (still dressed as a man, of course) went to meet Beyoğlu. After they had greeted each other and talked for awhile, Beyoğlu said, "Let us play backgammon." After the girl had agreed to this, he asked, "What shall the prize be for the winner?"

The youngest daughter answered, "I have in my tent a concubine whom I have never touched. If you win the backgammon game, I shall have her spend the night with you."

"Very well," said Beyoğlu, "and if you win, I shall give you a very expensive handgun."

When they played backgammon, she allowed Beyoğlu to win the game. The youngest daughter then said, "I must now return to my tent in order to send you the concubine." Back in her own tent, she took off her male disguise and replaced it with female clothing and jewels. Having done that, she went back to Beyoğlu's tent and slept with him that night. In the morning she went to her own tent and again disguised herself as a man. She ordered her tent to be taken down, and

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after that had been done, she and her attendants left the other troops and went home.

Beyoğlu spent almost two years in Chinese territory, where he won several battles. After he had returned to his mansion, he climbed to the top of its tower and called to the bezirci's daughter, "Hey, bezirci's youngest daughter, I have traveled much and fought much. Are you still going to refuse to marry me?"

She responded, "As I told you earlier, I shall marry you only if you will take me beneath your arm to the public bath, carrying my bohça for me as we go." Again no agreement was reached for their marriage.

Sometime later Beyoğlu was required to return to the war in China. As he and his aides were preparing to leave, the youngest daughter observed that this time Beyoğlu and his aides were wearing red uniforms, riding red horses, and carrying with them a red tent in which to sleep. As he was about to depart, the youngest daughter again said, "May you depart happily and return safely." Disguised as a man, she again joined the troops setting forth, but this time she and her attendants wore red uniforms, rode red horses, and carried a red tent.

When Beyoğlu halted his journey to rest, he ordered that his red tent be set up. The bezirci's daughter had her own red tent set up directly across the trail. When Beyoğlu saw that second red tent, he

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wondered who its owner might be. He sent a soldier to invite the commander of that second tent to visit him. The youngest daughter, dressed in male attire, went to his tent almost at once. After they had greeted each other and chatted for awhile, the youngest daughter suggested that they play backgammon. After he had agreed to this, she said, "If I should lose the backgammon game, I shall send my concubine to spend the night with you."

"And if I lose, I shall give you my very valuable handgun," responded Beyoğlu.

As she had done before, the youngest daughter let her opponent win. Going to her own tent, the youngest daughter took off her disguise and dressed in female clothing. After spending that night with Beyoğlu, she returned to her red tent, exchanged her female attire for her uniform, and rode, accompanied by her attendants, back to the home of her father.

After waging war for another two years and winning several victories, Beyoğlu himself returned to their village. As soon as he reached his mansion, he climbed its tower and called, "Hey, bezirci's daughter, have you changed your mind yet about marrying me?"

"No, I have not changed my mind. Until you do what I requested, I shall not marry you." By this time she had two sons, one from each night she had spent with Beyoğlu, and she was rearing these

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two boys by herself. She had named the first Çin (china) and the second Tarçın (cinnamon).⁶

After awhile it became necessary for Beyoğlu to renew his fighting in China. When he went to the youngest daughter and reported this, he also asked once again if she would marry him. “Go happily and return safely, but I shall not marry you until you have fulfilled my request.”

As she saw Beyoğlu’s troops preparing for departure, she noticed that this time they were wearing black uniforms, riding black horses, and carrying a black tent. She immediately ordered uniforms, horses, and a tent of the same color for her own group.

When the army came to a stopping place for the night, Beyoğlu had his black tent pitched upon a plain. As she had done twice before, the bezirci’s daughter had her own tent pitched just opposite his. When Beyoğlu observed this, he said, “Right across from us is another black tent just like mine.” To one of his aides he said, “Go and invite the commander of that other black tent to come and play backgammon with me this evening.”

⁶There is a play on words here. Although china (either the pottery or the country) and cinnamon are two very different things, the words almost rime: cin and tarçın—the difference being limited to the fact that one i is dotted and the other undotted. Partly because of the structure of the language, Turkish rimes more readily than does English, and Turks enjoy riming, whether it be in poetry or in prose.

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As before, the youngest daughter went at once in disguise to the tent of Beyoğlu. After they had agreed to play backgammon, the woman said, "If I should lose, I shall send to you for the night a concubine who has performed her function only twice during her life."

And Beyoğlu responded in exactly the same way he had done twice before: "If I should lose, I shall give you my very valuable handgun." The youngest daughter lost again at backgammon, and again she pretended to send Beyoğlu a concubine. Actually, it was not a concubine but the youngest daughter herself who spent the night with Beyoğlu. This time she had a daughter from Beyoğlu, a girl whom she named Vadet Hanım.⁷ Now having spent her third night with Beyoğlu, the woman returned home.

After another two years of warfare, Beyoğlu also returned to their village. From the tower of his mansion, he called out, "Hey, bezirci's daughter, have you changed your mind about marrying me? This is the last time I shall ask you this question. If you still refuse to marry me, I shall marry some other girl."

"As I have told you several times before, you will have to fulfill my request before I shall consent to marry you."

Beyoğlu then asked his parents to search for a suitable girl for him to marry. They found a pretty girl who was willing to marry their

⁷In Turkish this name means Lady Promise.

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son, and an engagement was arranged. The wedding date was set, and preparations were made for the wedding celebration. Drums were beaten every day, and servants began cooking food for a very large party. While all of this activity was going on, Beyoğlu sat in a comfortable chair before his mansion.

One day the bezirci's daughter dressed her three children in their best clothes and gave them the following instructions. "Go to his mansion and walk back and forth before Beyoğlu. As you are doing this, Tarçın Bey, shout to your brother, 'Oh, Çin Bey!' And you, Çin Bey, will answer, 'What is it, Tarçın Bey?' And then Tarçın Bey should say, 'Çin Bey, hold tightly to the hand of our little sister, Vadet Hanım. Her father's wedding party is beginning, and horses might run over her.' Then after your father has heard you say these things, pass in front of him again."

Holding each other by the hand, the children went to the mansion, where they saw Beyoğlu sitting in his chair. Tarçın Bey shouted, "Çin Bey!"

Çin Bey asked, "What is it, Tarçın Bey?"

Tarçın Bey responded, "Oh, Çin Bey, hold tightly to the hand of our little sister, Vadet Hanım. Her father is having a wedding party, and the horses of the guests might run over her!" Then they walked again past their father.

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Very surprised at what he had heard the children say, he called them to him and asked them to repeat their conversation. After they had done this, he looked very closely at the children and suddenly knew what had happened. Even though the wedding celebration had begun, and even though the drums were still beating, he took the children by their hands and led them back to the home of the bezirci's daughter. As soon as he saw that woman, he said, "Bring out your bohça! I shall take you to the bath, and I shall carry your bohça there for you. You will go there beneath my arm." The mother held the hands of two of the children, and Beyoğlu held the third child by one hand and carried the bohça under his other arm. In this way they proceeded to the public bath.

Soon after that, the youngest daughter of the bezirci and Beyoğlu were married. The mother and the three children moved into the mansion. There other children were born, and they all lived happily for the rest of their lives.

(My grandmother told me this story. Her name was Zeynep.)